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Giorgione's Madonna and Child

AT

CASTELFRANCO.

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Giorgione's Madonna and Child.



GIORGIO BARBARELLI, of Castelfranco, better known as Giorgione, may be taken as the representative Master of the Venetian School. His rich and glowing colouring, and the brilliancy and light which are predominant in his works, show the influence of Gio-

vanni Bellini, but Giorgione was the first Venetian painter who gave full play to the national love of life and colour. There is a flavour of Carpaccio's work in Giorgione's pictures, but there is more freedom and more

grace in his works than is found in those of the earlier master. At the same time it is impossible to deny that some of the indescribable charm of Carpaccio's work—perhaps better described as “quaintness” than in any other way—is wanting in Giorgione. As the leader and founder of what may be called the “Gorgeous” epoch of Venetian Art, Giorgione occupies a place by himself, closely followed by his contemporary and fellow-student, Titian. It should be noted, however, that, while Giorgione's progress was rapid, that of Titian was far more slow and laborious, and it is perhaps not too much to say that the effect of the different ways in which their respective talents developed is reflected in their works. The brilliancy of Giorgione's work and the beauty of his colouring were assimilated by Titian, who, in his work done after the other's early death, seems to have combined them with his own more dignified style.

Giorgione was born at Castelfranco, on the mainland near Venice, about 1477, being, it is said, the illegitimate son of a member of the family of the Barbarelli. It is difficult to fix any date when his work first began to be appreciated by the Venetians; all the more so, as works formerly attributed to him, and from the style of which some approximate date as to the time of their execution might perhaps be hazarded, are, under the fierce ordeal of modern art criticism, steadily decreasing in number. It cannot even be asserted of the picture, which is the subject of this brief notice, that it is known when Giorgione painted it, though there are sufficient data connected with it to enable us to hazard a conjecture.

Castelfranco, where we find this picture, is a town but rarely reached by the ordinary traveller to Venice; but it



VIRGIN AND CHILD, BY GIORGIONE, AT CASTELFRANCO.

[Size of Chromolithograph, 2 ft. 2 in. by 1 ft 7 in.]

is well worthy of a visit, if only to see this single work. The town itself is one of those half pathetic, wholly interesting records of what Venice once was. St. Mark's Lion still keeps guard over the old gateway; but the walls of the old town, which dates from 1169, are ruinous, and the city within them looks lifeless and deserted. The newer town, outside the old walls, is the ordinary Italian country town. Many of the houses bear traces of fresco, now rapidly crumbling to ruins, reminding us of Bassano and the neighbouring villages. At Castelfranco, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, lived Tuzio Costanzo, one of those professional soldiers who with their adherents did so much to carve out the history of those times. His son, Matteo, followed in his father's footsteps, and became a condottiere in the service of the Venetian republic. But he died quite young at Ravenna, in 1504, and his father caused this altarpiece to be painted by Giorgione as a votive offering in memory of his son.

The question of the date of this picture is the more perplexing, as the frescoes which, tradition says, Giorgione painted at the same time, have long ago disappeared with the old church which contained them; but there seems to be no reason to doubt that it was painted shortly after the death of Matteo Costanzo.

The picture is painted on panel, is 6 ft. 7 in. by 4 ft. 9 in., and is now in the Church of Castelfranco. The composition is dignified, but full of grace and colour. In the centre, the Blessed Virgin sits on a high throne with the Infant Saviour on her lap. The lower step of the draped throne rises high above the chequered pavement on which stand S. Francis and S. Liberale:

S. Francis, on the right of the picture, pointing to his stigmata and robed in the habit of his order; S. Liberale, on the left, in full armour, with one foot slightly raised by a low step in the pavement, his helmet on his head and holding a glove in one hand; in the other a standard bearing a white cross on a red ground. The Virgin holds the Saviour on one arm, and rests the other on a robe support of her throne. She is robed in a green robe and a flowing crimson upper garment. The Infant Saviour is sitting on a white cloth on the Virgin's lap, looking towards S. Liberale; an embroidered carpet falls from the foot of the throne, and on the front of the lower step are the arms of the Costanzi, placed, whether by accident or design, out of the centre. At the back of the throne is a wall draped with dark red as high as the standing saints in front, over which appears what is probably the most exquisite piece of landscape ever painted by Giorgione—a lovely Italian spring morning, with all its dewy freshness. On the left is a square tower; on the right a ruined Roman temple; and, between them, an airy, joyous landscape, sloping down to the shore of a placid lake—painted evidently by a man who knew well the plains of Lombardy and appreciated to the full their beauty. The beautiful Madonna is supposed to be the portrait of her whom Giorgione addressed in the lines he wrote on the back of the panel by way of signature, now obliterated,—

Cara Cecilia,
Vieni t' affretta;
Il tuo t' aspetta
Giorgio.....

There is a quiet calm about the whole picture, which

distinguishes it from many other works by Giorgione, notably from the Concert in the Pitti at Florence; but the transparency of the atmosphere and the beauty of the landscape, as well as its character, forcibly recall the picture in the Manfrini Palace, Venice, said, but probably without authority, to contain the portraits of Giorgione and his wife.

The S. Liberale of the Castelfranco picture has been by some supposed to be the portrait of Giorgione himself; by others, that of Matteo Costanzo. The latter conjecture seems to be the more accurate. One reason for so thinking is, that the effigy of Costanzo in the cemetery of Castelfranco closely follows the armour represented in Giorgione's picture. This point, however, can be readily investigated by those who choose to do so, the original study for the S. Liberale being in the National Gallery; it is painted on panel 1ft. 3in. by 10½in., and is well worthy of close examination.

So many pictures have been erroneously assigned to Giorgione, that it is difficult to disentangle his actual work, and it is probable that his reputation would stand even higher than it does, were those works that are Giorgionesque clearly separated from those by his own hand. The estimation in which Giorgione was held by his fellow-citizens, may be judged from the fact, that in 1506 he was commissioned, by the Municipality of Venice, to paint in fresco one of the frontages of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, the other being assigned to Titian; these frescoes have now disappeared in common with most others in Venice. It is tolerably certain that a large portion of Giorgione's works were painted in fresco; the present scarcity of such works in Venice may account for the

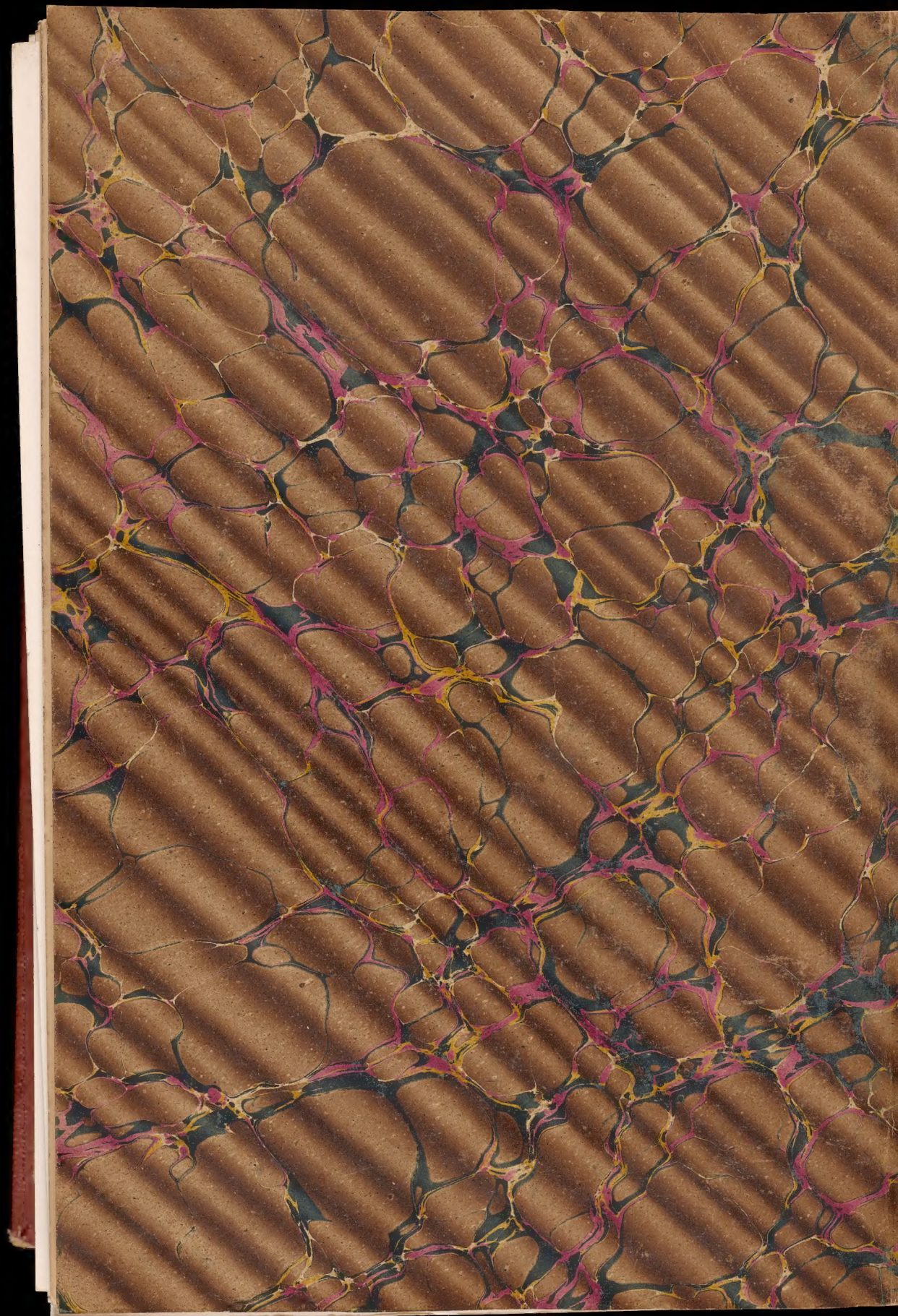
paucity of those that may with certainty be assigned to him. Reference should be made for full information respecting his works to Messrs. Crowe & Cavallaselle's "History of Painting in North Italy," vol. ii.

Giorgione died in 1511, and his remains were, in 1638, removed to Castelfranco.

The water-colour drawing from which the chromolithograph under notice is taken was made by Herr Kaiser. The printing in colour was done by Messrs. Storch & Kramer, of Berlin.



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